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PARLIAMENTARY REFORM,

CONSIDERED.

BY

SIR JOHN WALSH, BART. M.P.

SECOND EDITION.

LONDON :

JAMES RIDGWAY, 169, PICCADILLY.

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M.DCCC.XXXI.

TILLING, PRINTER, CHELSEA.

58  
537  
1837  
47

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## PARLIAMENTARY REFORM.

## SECTION I.

## INTRODUCTION.

THE great excitement prevailing throughout the nation upon the subject of Parliamentary Reform, must attract the most anxious attention, in every one alive to the importance of the question. There can be little doubt that the public have been awakened to this intense interest from a recent state of comparative indifference, that very lately it was not much considered, and was left to those Reformers *par metier*, who constitute a small sect, and made few proselytes. Before I attempt to enter into the momentous question itself, some remarks upon the nature, and temper of this sudden, and strong feeling is an important preliminary.

When any great question of national policy gradually, and steadily advances in the favourable opinion of the enlightened, and reflecting portion of the community, when it is advocated by the wisest, and most eminent statesmen of all parties, when it numbers among its converts the ablest of its former opponents, when it enlists as its supporters almost all the recruits from the rising generation, when, lastly, originating among the higher, and better informed ranks, it little by little conciliates, or overpowers the hostile prejudices

of the mass, such circumstances constitute the strongest presumptive evidence of its wisdom, and policy that the testimony of public opinion can afford.

It will be easily perceived, I think, that I am not now describing the progress of the Reform question; in all these points it offers a marked contrast to the progress, and triumph of the measure of Catholic Emancipation. There is another leading difference between them worthy of observation. In proportion as the Catholic question was investigated, sifted, and argued, as it were, in the presence of the whole nation, its scope, and probable operation, became better defined; indistinct apprehensions were removed, its objects became more precise, and its consequences clearer. Each party knew, one what was to be obtained, the other what it wished to withhold. We have not reached this epoch in the history of Reform. The word is a singularly vague one; it means every thing, and any thing; it conveys no positive idea whatever; but seems to have a different acceptance in each different mouth, and to assume as many shapes, to give birth to as many different plans, as there are parties, or distinct interests in the nation.

The petitions which are presented to the House of Commons, and the views which are taken by the newspapers, are founded upon many assertions, which are entirely assumed, upon principles, which are greatly controverted, and upon expectations of future benefits, which could never be realized.

1st. They build all their conclusions upon the theory, that the will of the people, that is of the numerical majority of the people, is, or ought to be, the only legitimate source of government and authority. They regard that government as the best, purest, and most calculated for the general good, which derives its power most directly from this fountain head, and is the most faithful interpreter of this will.

2d. They believe that the present constitution of the empire is an usurpation of the higher classes; that there existed at some period of our history, either in the days of the Saxon Wittena Gemote, or anterior to the invasion of Julius Cæsar, or at some other time not exactly specified, a greater degree of freedom, and happiness, a more equal representation, a House of Commons more independent of the executive, and more dependent on the people, than they have ever been blessed with since.

3d. They take for granted that the administration of the executive has constantly been, and is profligate and corrupt, in the highest degree; that the whole modern history of our country is a series of unjust and impolitic wars; and that our internal and domestic government is a grinding tyranny, wringing their hard earnings from the laborious classes, by iniquitous taxes, to lavish the produce in sinecures, and pensions, upon venal place-hunters, and upon grasping nobles.

4th. They constantly suppose, that as every political evil is the result of the misrule to which they

have been subjected, so parliamentary reform is the sovereign panacea which is to cure them all instantaneously, that the nation is to be completely relieved from every burthen, that the inferior classes are to obtain an extended command over all the necessities, and enjoyments of life, and that a great and immediate accession of national prosperity will follow this measure.

5th. Lastly, the most influential advocates of Reform openly declare, that any probable concession which may be obtained from the Legislature, any partial alteration in the mode of representation, is only a step to another, and a more extensive one. They frankly profess that it is their object and aim to effect, either gradually, or at once, a complete change in the whole constitution of the government; and that all our laws and institutions are to be subjected to so entire a modification, as to render it impossible for the wisest to calculate the effects of such extensive mutations upon the whole frame-work of existing society.

Such appear to me the principal arguments, and propositions, which have been, at different times, very ably, and ingeniously supported, which have, either wholly, or in part, been adopted by the friends of Reform, and upon which their views, and opinions have very generally been founded. Such are the impressions which sometimes separately, sometimes indistinctly blended together, are entertained by the public, and form the basis of that eager demand for reform, which makes itself so loudly heard.

I am aware, that, in stating the opinions of others, I am liable to misrepresent them; I am aware, that many a partizan of Reform may justly say, " You do not describe my motives or my objects accurately; I am not principally influenced by the reasons you have enumerated; my conclusions are drawn from different premises." Admitting the full force of such remarks, admitting that many arguments in favour of Parliamentary Reform cannot be classed under these heads, I still am persuaded that they do comprize the majority of those which have the greatest influence upon the public mind at this time. I am no uncompromising antagonist of reform; and those, perhaps, do no disservice to the cause of practical, and rational reform, who, as we enter upon this vast field, endeavour to trace some boundaries to its extent. Nor is a determined hostility to a principle to be inferred, because, in a sincere and impartial search after truth, some of the arguments by which it is supported appear to be doubtful, or erroneous. And in a question like that of Reform, which embraces a thousand others, which means every thing, from the transfer of the franchise of a borough to the adjoining hundred, to the assimilation of the British Constitution with that of Modern America, or of Ancient Athens, it is very desirable that Reformers should be classified, and that we should know how many different regiments of opinions are enlisted under the same banner.

## SECTION II.

## THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THE PEOPLE.

IN the physical world, our discoveries of the great secondary causes, or laws, which govern the universe, have been derived from an attentive observation of facts, and from the inferences which have been drawn from them. Wherever an uniform operation of nature has been perceived, a general principle has been established, and the mightiest results of science are contained in this generalization of the fruits of our experience.

The most powerful minds, in quitting this sure guide, and in entering upon the trackless void of hypothesis and conjecture, have been speedily led into error. The analogy appears perfect in the moral world; and he who would speculate upon man, either in his individual, or social capacity, upon other data than those with which history, and experience furnish us, would soon be entangled in a web of errors fraught with far more practical mischief, than the baseless theories of Ptolemy, and Descartes.

The proof of the dogma of the Sovereignty of the People is the object of Rousseau's celebrated treatise, "*Le Contrat Social*;" and to reconcile

his theory with facts, he makes a gratuitous supposition of an implied compact originally entered into between the governors, and the governed, and reasons upon the imaginary conditions of this compact, as astronomers found their calculations upon the ideal lines of the Equator and the Zodiac. But it appears a manifest fallacy to prove the existence of a principle which is at variance with facts and experience, by the assumption of a purely fanciful hypothesis; and *Le Contrât Social* will be classed by all correct reasoners as a brilliant but hollow paradox.

The Sovereignty of the People cannot be established as the true principle of government, simply, because such a Sovereignty never has existed to our knowledge since the creation of man; because the evidence of all times, and the history of all nations, prove that while the Deity formed us as social beings, he made some form of government, and the consequent relation of the governors and the governed, coeval with our very existence. The will of the whole people must always be more inert, and consequently less powerful than the will of some portion of that people. Wherever such a maxim has been recognised, it has led to constant alternations of power into the hands of different persons claiming to be the interpreters of that will, until, by a tacit abjuration of it, some more permanent form has succeeded. The equal authority of laws, and the enjoyment of civil and personal liberty, are the offspring of no recurrence

to primitive rights ; they are the last results of civilization and intelligence, the consequences of a long series of discipline and controul, to which the popular will has been subjected, and they are preserved by the maintenance of certain restraints. The subjection of man to the authority of his fellow, never was an act of pure volition ; it was an effect of the circumstances of his position, and of the instinctive wants of his nature. We might as well call the power of a Queen Bee an usurpation, and assert that the bell sheep is the mere interpreter of the will of the flock.

But although it is generally admitted by sane minds that the will of the mass cannot directly govern, the existence of an inherent though dormant right is still stoutly maintained ; and it is asserted, that since the device of a representative system affords an organ to the expression of that will, the right revives, and that the people, through these their agents, ought to possess the substantive authority of the State. I can still see no valid argument in this fiction of a latent right, which it is acknowledged has never existed, which mankind could never have exercised or possessed, and could not therefore delegate. I must return to my position, that there is clear evidence of the intention of the Creator that mankind should be formed into communities, some portion the depositaries of, and the rest amenable to authority ; that we cannot at once suppose a right only to be governed by their own consent, and believe in such an intention

which would necessarily cancel it, that this division of our species is general, and conformable to a universal law, that the representative system, (however admirable as a human invention) is only partially adopted among the nations of the earth, and that it is absurd to suppose a common right thus generally in abeyance, and only revived to so limited an extent.

The Sovereignty of the People, and the divine right of Kings, appear to me to be principles, equally erroneous in themselves, and equally inimical to the happiness of society; the one leading directly to despotism, the other to anarchy and confusion.

There are two grounds upon which the propositions are supported, that the will of the people ought to be the ruling power of the State, and that governments approach excellence inasmuch as they most directly reflect that will. One, founded upon the assumption, or inference of an inherent right, the other upon the assertion that in fact those governments are the best, diffuse happiness most widely, check the abuses incident to government most efficaciously, and secure the great institutions of society most safely, in proportion as they derive their force immediately, and renew it frequently from this source.

Now, if the first of these positions be established, it supersedes the discussion of the second. If a positive right exists, its effects do not destroy it; if its consequences are evil, we may lament; if

they are good, we may rejoice in them ; but these sentiments do not affect its existence. We may deplore that a man in possession of fortune, dissipates it in gaming, or extravagance, and reduces his family to beggary, but his right to dispose of his own is undoubted, and we cannot interfere to prevent him.

But having discussed the question of right, and denied its existence, it is next incumbent upon us to examine that of expediency. The first, involved mixed considerations of abstract reasoning, and of the deductions from facts and experience ; the second, is an argument from facts and experience only. We have no means of judging what will be for the benefit of mankind, except by observing what has contributed to it. It is evident that the recognition of the principle at all, is a virtual adoption of a purely democratic basis of government. Whatever power is bestowed by the people, may be legally, and at pleasure resumed by them. No authority can be compatible with such a theory, except a delegated and temporary one. I do not see how (whatever practical modification might be introduced) we could avoid drawing this conclusion, that the great end and aim of government should be, upon every measure, to elicit the wishes of the majority of the nation, and to fulfil them. The attempt to establish this form of government is no new experiment.

It has uniformly, except in one very peculiar

and recent instance, totally failed. While it endured in the ancient Greek republics, in France during the first years of the revolution ; in every other part of the world, except the United States, it has constantly proved of short duration ; it has torn society by frequent convulsions ; it has placed the reality of power in the hands of demagogues, who have ruled by the passions of the people, and it has been ever ready to violate, on lighter pretexts than even despotic tyranny, the security of property and person.

Wherever the will of the people, of the *masses*, according to the current phrase of the day, has been called into activity, and the powers of the State rendered immediately and directly dependent upon it, the elements of order and stability have been wanting, the influence of mind, and intelligence has been suspended, national prosperity and individual happiness have been injured, and such a state of things has always been temporary, because it was insufferable.

In the United States, a government originally republican, and assuming daily a more purely democratic character, has existed for nearly fifty years ; a brief space in the history of nations. To the high credit of that energetic, enterprising, and intelligent people, this form has there, and there only, been found compatible with the institutions of civilized life. But I will beg my readers to observe, that the experiment cannot yet be con-

sidered as fully tried, that the Americans inherited from us an admirable system of laws, and that they sprung into existence as a nation, trained to obedience to these laws as a colony. How peculiar, too, are its circumstances, a graft from the most civilized nation in the world, upon a boundless and an unappropriated territory. The rights of property there are almost universally diffused, and the collision of interests is rendered less close by the wide space over which the nation scatters itself. This is a very singular combination, and ought to be regarded as a solitary exception. We see that even in the Spanish American Republics, though equally favoured by position, the same results have not been obtained, and they may be cited as examples of the evils which have always attended democracies.

There is a belief that, left to themselves, the body of the people will, by a sort of instinct, by a kind of moral chemistry, extracting the essence of truth and reason from the mass of error and prejudice, favour those measures, and select those men best adapted to advance the interests of the whole. I cannot give my assent to this maxim *Vox populi, vox Dei*. I can understand no process by which, when a vast majority of individuals are ignorant, uninformed, and prejudiced upon a subject, a small minority should direct them to decide wisely. Truth, if left to itself, will out in time, but with such materials it would be a very long

time in getting out; and as delay would not be permitted, the wrong decision would most frequently precede the right opinion.

In England, happily, public opinion means, and is confined to the educated and intelligent members of the community; to those who are open to new impressions; who can understand and balance different arguments. Yet, with all this faculty of discrimination, it is a great advantage that our form of government does not yield too pliantly to every tide of public opinion; that each great and important measure is detained, as it were, some time under our examination. We must all be aware that public opinion is, and has always been, very often quite wrong, particularly at first; that instead of being the opinion of all, it is frequently the opinion of a few, and is adopted by the rest, who merely echo it; and that experience shows it as liable to error, mistake, and prejudice, as the opinion of any individual. What is called public opinion is frequently an opinion taken up by two or three leading periodicals, and imbibed for a certain number of weeks by a considerable portion of the community with their breakfast. People sally forth for the day, and naturally carve materials for conversation with their acquaintances in the street, club, counting-house, or dinner table, from these ingenious articles. It is much easier, upon subjects with which they may have a limited acquaintance, and no strong interest, to adopt and

retail, than to weigh, balance, and examine. A certain number of watch-words and current sentiments, are thus passed from mouth to mouth; a general impression is created, and we are shortly told, that this or that question, involving, perhaps, the most vital interests of the State, has made a wonderful progress, and that the public feelings have undergone a marked change upon it within the last two months. A new opinion is a little like a new fashion in dress; the tailors and milliners invent certain fresh modes every year; it is quite one of the arcana of their trade. Sometimes these modes do not take at all; they cannot get into fashion; nobody knows why: others are more successful, they have a great vogue for a long season before they are laid by and forgotten. Upon the whole, this constant starting of fresh matter for our attention and scrutiny, is highly beneficial. The intellectual faculties of the community are stimulated, and kept in exercise. Curiosity being awakened, and directed to any subject, mind is brought to bear upon it; and the question, which was first started in the columns of the Newspaper or the Review, is explored, developed, and finally disposed of by the profound labours of the scholar, the political philosopher, and the statesman. All that can be objected to, is identifying this noisy and fleeting echo with the calm and final judgment of the reason and intellect of the country.

No one estimates more highly the value of an

intelligent, active, and enlightened public opinion, than I do ; no one is more sensible of the wholesome influence which it exercises upon the executive, the legislature, and the nation ; but it has not yet established the slightest claim to infallibility ; and from the time when it should be converted from a vigilant observer, an attentive monitor, into a controuling and dictatorial power, its tendencies would be as pernicious as they are now salutary.

But if such be the nature of the opinion of the cultivated part of the British nation, what would be that of the great body of the uneducated, or half educated people ? They will either be entirely cyphers, or they would add to the mass of error, and render it more easy for prejudice, or clamour, to stifle the voice of reason. Perhaps, were England polled, the majority might still be of opinion, that the Sun moved round the Earth. Would they be likely to entertain juster notions upon politics, that most difficult and deceiving of all sciences, the results of which are so frequently the very opposite of those which a first view would lead us to suppose ?

It has been argued, that the elective franchise properly should be vested in all persons of education and property. There can be no natural right thus created. Such an argument must be founded upon the grounds of the probable advantages and benefits to the community. It cannot be a part or a modification of the principle of the sovereignty

of the people. If there is no inherent right in the whole people, still less is there an inherent right in any portion of that people. The merits of a practical measure, fixing any arbitrary qualification upon such a basis, are fair subjects of discussion; but it must be upon considerations of expediency, not of right. Education, like Reform, is a word admitting of great latitude of interpretation. It signifies every thing, from an attendance upon a Sunday School, to the most brilliant academical honours; from a knowledge of reading and writing, to the highest culture and the most extensive acquirements of human intellect. In the sense in which it is used by the popular writers of the day, a very slight tincture of education appears to be meant. If that degree of it be intended, which would give the reason a predominance over the passions and prejudices, which would at all assist the judgment in forming correct conclusions in politics, a much greater share would be required. Nothing is so deceiving as those misty perceptions of such complicated subjects, which the first slender knowledge of books affords. Moving in such a fog, people mistake the size, nature, and relative bearing, of all the land-marks they manage dimly to descry; they soon become irretrievably puzzled.

If it be such a portion of mental cultivation as may enable the possessor accurately to comprehend, for example, the arguments pro and con, of any of the great questions of internal, foreign, or

colonial policy which divide our councils, such a qualification might be a very admirable one, if the line could possibly be drawn; but it would certainly be one of the narrowest that could be selected. It would not extend beyond the gentry, including members of the liberal and learned professions, and of the commercial world, artists, literary men by profession, and the flower of the middle ranks. Whether such a limit would be consonant to the views of Reformers in general, may be doubted. It would certainly not give our representation a more popular form than it bears at present.

## SECTION III.

COMPOSITION, AND POWERS OF THE HOUSE OF  
COMMONS, AT FORMER PERIODS OF OUR HIS-  
TORY.

WERE the fact once established that the English nation ever enjoyed, at any remote time, a greater degree of real freedom, than they do at present, such a conclusion would be one of the most painful to the friends of rational liberty.

Could it be proved that free institutions were contemporary alone with barbarous periods, with an early and rude state of society, that as men advanced in knowledge and civilization, if they did not abjure the principles, they discarded the spirit, and relinquished the possession of freedom, we should be led to fear that liberty could claim no natural alliance with prosperity and happiness.

Fortunately for those who believe, that, in spite of a thousand errors, temporary misfortunes, partial retrograde movements, mankind are essentially progressive, who love liberal government from no blind attachment to a name, but because they think that a large mixture of the ingredient of freedom promotes the developement of our highest faculties, and the attainment of practical good, the

evidence of our history establishes the direct reverse.

We trace, indeed, through remote ages, the germ of those principles which have since borne so admirable a fruit, as in the biography of some eminent individual, we love to note in childhood the first sparks of genius, the earliest indications of future excellence. The mild and equitable practice of our common law, the institutions of Alfred, the provisions of Magna Charta, and the statutes of the Edwards, are all parts of the foundations of this noble edifice. We may cite them with pride, as proofs of the innate love of freedom in the hearts of Englishmen, and of the strong practical good sense which all their national acts evince, from their first existence as a people.

But when, in the twilight of tradition, we seek to discover the outline of a uniform, and regular representation in Parliament, we find that the miracles of Merlin the Enchanter, the adventures of King Arthur, and the exploits of his Knights of the Round Table, rest upon far better ground. No records have been handed down to us of the composition of, or manner of summoning or assembling the Wittena Gemote of our Saxon ancestors. In this absence of all direct evidence, we are at perfect liberty to make what conjectures we please respecting it; and the arguments against the existence of universal suffrage, vote by ballot, and annual Parliaments, are purely presumptive, and derived from analogy. Yet upon the best consi-

deration the materials present, antiquarians have been inclined to conclude that it was similar to the assemblies of elders common to the rude tribes of Germany; and, compared with modern times, probably bore a closer affinity to a meeting of Sachems among the North American Indians, than to the structure of our present Parliament. Whatever may have been the merits of their system, it seems too entirely lost in the night of past time to admit of revival, and far too indefinite and obscure, to allow of any claim of right being founded upon its extinct and forgotten forms. Indeed, the whole argument is so groundless, unsubstantial, and illusory, that it can never rank among the tenable opinions of men of letters and understanding, but must be classed as one of those fraudulent appeals to the ignorance and passions of the multitude which are resorted to by designing demagogues.

The warlike Monarchs of the Norman race, with their mail clad Barons, their forestal rights, their tenures by military service, bringing the feudal system in all its perfection in their train, cannot be regarded as the champions of popular and equal rights, or their reigns as the golden era of civil liberty. There ran, indeed, through the chivalrous institutions of the middle ages a certain irregular, and almost indefinable love of liberty, "which kept alive, even in servitude itself, the spirit of an exalted freedom;" but this sentiment, however worthy of the eloquent eulogy of Burke,

was of much too lordly and exclusive a character to incline them the least to the adoption of any peculiarly democratic basis of representation. Our early Parliaments appear to have been entirely composed of Nobles and dignified Clergy ; and the first mixture of a more popular element in its composition seems to have been an innovation of Simon de Mountfort in the reign of Henry the Third, to render it the instrument of his criminal ambition.

It was long before it grew into importance or power ; and the comparatively small number of members in Henry the Sixth's reign, only 300, the qualification too of voters for Knights of the Shire, 40*s.*, which then equalled as many pounds of our times, shew how little of an extended or popular character the House of Commons possessed. It may, however, be justly remarked of these early Parliaments, that the close boroughs, the representation of places having no population or importance, an irregularity so much animadverted upon in our days, had then no existence. That is the mere effect of time, and of the decline of the former opulence of these towns. However, the privilege exercised by the Crown, of leaving out old, or summoning from new boroughs, according to its own good will or pleasure, would probably be considered as a full equivalent, and would tend to throw a little too much power into the hands of the executive. The sturdiest Reformer will altogether be inclined to allow that, in the nursing of our

young liberties, the gradual creeping of this defect into our system was attended with less dangerous consequences than the continued exercise of so formidable a discretionary power by the Crown. But from the great authority of the Nobles, it seems certain that an influence of a very despotic kind was early resorted to by them in the election of burgesses.

It is not merely in the mode of its election, but in the subordinate part it acted, in its utter insignificance as a political power, that we see the nature of the House of Commons in these times. During the fierce struggles between the Kings and Barons, the long wars of the Houses of York and Lancaster, how seldom do we hear of the Parliament—how silent is the voice, how impotent the authority of the third branch of the Legislature.

It is not under the sceptre of the Tudors, the tyranny of Henry the Eighth, or the vigorous but arbitrary government of Elizabeth, that we shall find traces of the independence of the House of Commons. It was a matter of very little importance how they were chosen, since it was clearly a mode which did not leave them a fraction of a will of their own.

From the accession of the Stuarts alone can we date the rise of the power and importance of Parliament, as it now exists. All its preceding history does but shew a few partial indications of its destined greatness. It was no creation of human wisdom, no settled plan; it grew gradually, from

small beginnings, like an acorn thrown into the ground, and was adapted, by circumstances, into an organ for the assertion of the rights, and support of the interests of the nation. When fierce Simon de Mountfort summoned the Knights of Shires to aid his lawless attempts to usurp the sovereign authority, he no more dreamed of a full, fair, and equal representation of the people, than he did of defeating Mr. Goulburn's motion on the Civil List, and causing the Duke of Wellington's resignation.

In the history of our country we find the most natural explanation of the various irregularities in the composition of the House; we see that these anomalies have not prevented it from being a faithful interpreter of the spirit of each succeeding age, and a useful servant in the great cause of rational liberty. If mature consideration shall fully establish that these imperfections are injurious to the action of the machine, and can safely be cured, no attachment to ancient forms should deter us from entering upon the task. But we must bring them forward as novel improvements, the responsibility of their introduction must rest with the present age; we must proceed upon the lights of our own times, not upon Saxon or Norman precedents. We shall not discover models to work by, in the depths of antiquarian research; and it is incumbent upon us to advance cautiously, for we are pioneers in a new path, and can derive no aid from the suggestions of past experience.

## SECTION IV.

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REVIEW OF THE PRACTICAL MERITS OF OUR  
GOVERNMENT.

THERE is no question connected with that of Reform, upon which it is more important to form correct opinions than this. Whether we shall introduce any change at all, to what extent, and in what manner we shall change our present system of government, depend entirely upon our knowledge of its excellencies and defects, and upon the means we possess of remedying the latter, without disproportionately subtracting from the former. Nothing can be more self-evident than this proposition; the only difficulty lies not in the statement, but in the solution. It is more arduous because there is no fixed rule to go by, no settled point to depart from, no previous plan to compare with, no established theory to refer to, in the whole fabric of our constitution. It is throughout a collection of anomalies, a blending of different elements, and union of distinct principles; an amalgamation of various interests, an almost fortuitous combination of its component parts. It has been cemented into one vast irregular whole; it has adapted itself to the

wants, circumstances, and national character of the people, by the silent operation of time, and by the insensible and reciprocal influence between them. Such institutions can be judged only by their results; they defy all abstract reasoning, they challenge comparison with those of other countries, they appeal to history and experience. This large mixture of accident in the composition of our Government; this characteristic of unexpected effects produced by its combinations, as little to be anticipated as the discovery of gunpowder from the union of saltpetre and brimstone, has been one main cause of the almost superstitious reluctance felt by many able statesmen to attempt remedying its most trifling defect. They reasoned, that as human wisdom had not created it, and could not fully estimate its latent workings, or the connexion which one part had with another, it was dangerous to tamper with it, or to attempt innovations, which, however apparently beneficial in their immediate effects, might produce ultimate ones of a very different description. This argument has been pushed too far, but it may fairly operate with those who do not condemn the British Constitution altogether, to the extent of inducing the most extreme caution in every important alteration. One remark may here be made, that this gradual formation of our Government, and the natural influence of the people upon it, and it upon the people, are strong proofs

of the existence of that uniformity between the laws and the national character, wants, and habits, which is in itself no trifling good.

Those determined advocates of a very extensive Parliamentary Reform, whose party zeal renders them little scrupulous of the means by which they support their cause, and who certainly cannot claim the weight which coolness, impartiality, and candour, give to opinions, appear to agree with me, that it is very much a practical question. They take up incidentally other positions, such as the Sovereignty of the People, a former pure representation, &c., but they principally dwell upon the abuses of the present system, upon the profligacy and extravagance of public men, upon the cruel oppression of the taxes, upon the unnecessary burthens heaped upon the people, and upon the remedy from all these evils to be found in Parliamentary Reform.

If we look back to the history of Europe since the year 1688, there are certainly none of the usual proofs of a bad government; and the annals of no country, perhaps, have ever presented a more uniform course of prosperity, a more steady and unvarying progress of improvement, or a richer harvest of well-founded and merited glory. Our internal wealth, and our external influence and power, have been boundlessly augmented. Of the four great wars in which we have been engaged, three were undertaken for a mighty European object, in which our own interests were

identified with the liberties and independence of nations. They were marked by splendid achievements, and were conducted to a glorious and successful termination. One war, indeed, was more questionable in its policy, and less fortunate in its issue, but in its commencement it was the error, not less of the people than of the government; the blame is at least a divided one. During this period our institutions have fixed the admiration of Europe, the greatest writers of the continent, from Voltaire and Montesquieu to Madame de Stael,\* have celebrated their excellence, and almost every people has successively endeavoured, at the expense of enormous sacrifices, by the most determined attempts, to introduce and copy them. A long succession of great and illustrious statesmen have been trained to public life, by the means of these institutions, which have at least the merit of precluding weak and incapable men from acquiring or retaining power. There is this peculiar feature in our Constitution, that it has not, during this whole period, practically deteriorated. It has improved with the nation; its tendency has been gradually to free itself from blemishes. The Parliament has constantly been correcting abuses; it has been becoming less and less interested in its conduct. The House of Commons in Pitt's time was not venal, like that of Sir

\* L'Angleterre est le fanal de L'Europe.—*Madame de Stael.*

R. Walpole; and that of the present day is less influenced by ministerial patronage than that of Mr. Pitt. If a Reform be required, it never was less required than it is now, since 1688. I believe that patriotism is become a very unpopular sentiment; and that in dwelling upon the greatness and glory of England, upon the splendour of her actions, upon the renown of her warriors and statesmen, upon the excellence of her institutions, and the grandeur of her intellectual pre-eminence, I shall strike no sympathetic chord. Such feelings are regarded as a weak and visionary enthusiasm—as a mockery of distress. Our notes must be pitched to another key; we must deplore the growing poverty, the failing trade, the general misery of the country; we must mourn over the degraded and abject state of Englishmen; we must lament their condition as the climax of wretchedness, to which a long course of misrule has brought them. Our pity must not be for the man who can travel from Dan to Beersheeba, and cry, it is all barren, but for him who can so inopportunely discover the green spots in the wilderness.

The charge against the executive does not appear so much for tyrannical or oppressive policy, for mal-administration in the conduct of affairs, or for incapacity, as for a want of economy, for a prodigality and extravagance in the public expenditure. The point at issue seems to be chiefly one of finance. The first and principal

item in the charges of the State is the national debt. The greatest proportion of it was incurred in the prosecution of that mighty conflict against the power of France; certainly the most arduous struggle, in which, since the existence of the kingdom, we were ever engaged. The first question is, whether the war was forced upon us in its commencement, or whether Mr. Pitt could, by diplomatic address, and negotiation, have at once restrained the other continental powers; and diverted, or confined within its own boundaries, the restless and ambitious spirit of the French Republic. Every opinion which can now be formed must be purely conjectural; and so impossible is it to predict the consequences of political movements, that could we now examine every actor on that scene, from Mirabeau to Napoleon; could we summon Pitt from his stately tomb, could we dive into the most secret records of every cabinet in Europe, we could obtain but an approximation to the truth. It seems certain, that the spirit of the French Republic was early a hostile and aggressive one; that they were speedily and inevitably in a state of jealousy and opposition towards the established governments of Europe. Whether great forbearance and conciliation on our part might have averted the storm, cannot now be known; it is certain that the experiment was not tried. I will only observe, that the policy of so cautious a course remains doubtful, even had it been practicable; and that,

probably, no government in England, however popular in its composition, would have sought to avoid war. The temper of Republics has rarely been pacific, or their annals bloodless. But whatever uncertainty may hang over this question, which no subsequent investigation can ever dissipate, every impartial mind must be convinced, that once embarked in the conflict, from the commencement of the war of the Revolution, down to the battle of Waterloo, no one opportunity offered for terminating it with honour or with safety. There was neither an inclination to negotiate, nor a sufficient character of stability and good faith to give security to treaties, under the fierce and turbulent sway of the Convention and the Directory. He has formed a very erroneous estimate of the character and genius of Napoleon, who can suppose that his was a temper with which compromise was possible.

The state of the case appears to be, that an unsolved doubt exists as to the possibility of our avoiding the war, and none at all as to the necessity of prosecuting it when once begun. As little can be entertained as to its nature requiring every exertion, and every sacrifice; it was a struggle for all that is valuable to a nation, for honour, liberty, independence, existence; and we won it. Can it be supposed that we could win without paying some price? Every other country saw the horrors of war brought home to the firesides of its inhabitants, horrors of which our imaginations

form a faint and inadequate picture. We avoided these miseries, but we added twenty millions to the permanent charge on the revenue. It is a great and a heavy burthen, it was incurred for a worthy and proportionate object. With respect to the conduct of the war, as a criterion of the ability of Government, errors were doubtless committed, some very important and unfortunate ones; but impartial posterity will, I think, pronounce upon the whole, that the country was guided through the trials and dangers of that memorable era with great skill, and a happy combination of prudence and enterprize.

The next point at issue is, admitting the war to be necessary, admitting the exertions we made to have been required to their utmost extent, could not the same results have been obtained at less cost? Was there not an unnecessary and culpable profusion in the expenditure? A perfectly satisfactory answer to this query could only be obtained by the labours of a second Mr. Hume, bestowed in a spirit of perfect impartiality upon the accounts of a thousand millions, and a period of twenty-five years. An opinion founded on less certain data, is all that I can offer. The heads of administration, I firmly believe, were free from all personal stain; they were most likely extremely desirous that the money should produce as much as possible; but in so vast an expenditure the power of controul was necessarily weaker, and the opportunities for speculation more numerous.

Neither the nation nor the executive had the same leisure to dwell upon details, afforded by more tranquil times, and the field for investigation was far wider. It would be a bold assertion, that, in such circumstances, the most economical course was uniformly adopted. But a greater degree of laxity in expense seems, at similar periods, from the reasons stated above, unavoidable and inherent in the nature of things, and no government could have entirely checked it.

If there is a passage in the history of these times which we have reason to regret, it undoubtedly is the management of the negotiations for the celebrated treaties of 1814 and 1815. It is certain that, always somewhat distinct from the continental nations, and having at that time been so entirely separated from them, during a great number of years, the country and the government were completely ignorant of their temper and feelings, and of the great changes in their nature and opinions, wrought in that period. We suffered ourselves to follow the lead of the great military powers, instead of taking that precedence to which our actions had entitled us, and which the moral influence, which we could then have easily placed ourselves at the head of, and which we could have directed to good, would have secured to us. We could have settled the affairs of Europe upon a really permanent basis, by effecting a compromise between old and new institutions, between the monarchical and liberal

parties, and an assimilation of the forms of government to our own. The golden opportunity was lost. At a later, and less auspicious period, this wise line of policy was embraced by the brilliant genius of Canning, and acted upon, during his enlightened administration, to considerable extent, and with eminent success. It was attempted afterwards in France by the judicious and eloquent Martignac, but with a less fortunate result.

We now arrive at the most important part of our history, with reference to the question of Reform. It is the general conduct and character, the actions and deeds, of the British House of Commons, during the last fifteen years. Has it during that period been a shameless, venal, profligate body, at the beck and controul of the Ministers of the Crown? Has it been unmindful of the interests, and deaf to the voice of the people? Has it effected nothing of retrenchment, enforced no principle of economy? Has it been utterly incompetent to the great ends of its existence? Has it been shown no advocate of the interests of the nation, no checking and controuling power upon the acts of the executive, no organ of the wants and wishes of the country? Has the public mind never derived any valuable information? have its occasional errors and mistakes not been removed? Has the House of Commons never been a channel for the dissemination of just views, for the correction of ex-

aggrated misrepresentations, for the soothing and evaporation of irritated feelings? And, lastly, has it become less free and independent, less active and intelligent, descending in the scale, and less competent to the fulfilment of its duties in this lapse of time? If so, then, indeed, is the hour of Reform come; is the necessity of Reform urgent; is the name of a Reformer synonymous with that of a true and enlightened friend of his country. But I must frankly state, that these positions cannot, in my judgment, be borne out by facts; that in all these particulars, the very reverse is the case. During all this time the influence of the Crown and of the Ministry has sensibly diminished, and a popular and liberal policy has gradually acquired a complete ascendancy. Constant examples may be adduced of the administration being defeated in measures against the sense of the country. In the great questions of the Repeal of the Test Acts, and of the Catholic disabilities, a triumph was achieved gratifying to the friends of liberty; and in retrenchment and alleviation of the burthens of the taxes, much has been effected. Above thirty millions of taxes have gradually been repealed since the peace, and if the remaining ones have become, consequently, more productive, that is a consequence of prosperity, not a proof of distress. We are sensible that all articles of general consumption are much reduced in price. The House is daily acquiring more exact knowledge respect-

ing the details of Finance, and applying itself to lop off the remaining excrescences of the system. The lists of places, pensions, &c., by the very publicity, will render jobs of rare occurrence. The luminous work of Sir Henry Parnell places the attainment of correct general views, upon the possible extent of retrenchment, within the reach of every reader of ordinary capacity and education. It is impossible to peruse that work, without feeling how valuable a present was made to the community in so clear and condensed an arrangement of the fruits of that able gentleman's extensive labours. But all are aware that he is the advocate for retrenchment, carried to its extreme limits. By comparing what he considers practicable, with what has been done, we shall see what can still be effected in this matter, so justly interesting to the people, and we shall observe how far it falls short of the extravagant expectations they have been taught to entertain, by the periodical writers of the ultra-liberal school.

Should we be blessed with a continuance of internal and external peace, those who have observed the current of events for some time past will be inclined to come to the conclusion, not only that much has been done in the way of retrenchment, but, that if no Reform should be made, the present House of Commons would, in a brief period, accomplish all retrenchment compatible with the maintenance of national faith and national strength. Nor are its labours less

important or less useful to the country, in the vast and arduous task of legal reform. The late Home Secretary has erected a durable monument to his fame, in his admirable consolidation of the voluminous and ill-digested Criminal Law. The Report of the Commissioners of real property, the Bill of Lord Brougham, for the establishment of Local Courts, and those of Mr. Campbell, and Lord Wynford, give promise of corresponding improvement in our civil law, a branch in which they were still more wanted, and where the beneficial effects will be still more sensibly felt by the nation. Now this uniform course of action, which has characterized the House of Commons for some years past, leads us to one of two conclusions, either that the present mode of election has had the merit of sending into the House a majority of men, of liberal and enlarged views, not blindly opposed to innovation, but bent on practical amelioration, or that the best and soundest sort of public opinion has had an increasing influence upon it. Probably, both opinions are, in some degree, correct. But either diminish the necessity for extensive Reform—and either should induce the nation to view, with no hostility, a body, which has added these more recent ones to those ancient claims upon our gratitude, which are chronicled in the brightest pages of British history; and to touch, with no irreverent and hasty hand, an institution, which has so singularly combined the blessing of sta-

bility in the form of government, with an aptitude for improvement in the detail.

I am aware, that, in the wide range I have taken in this section, the most general view alone was practicable. I could not enter into the proof of my argument by any elaborate details; I could only, like an index, point the attention of well-informed readers to those passages of our history, to those particular acts of our Parliament, which convinced me,

First, That the English House of Commons, however alloyed by the mixture of human failings, however defective, theoretically considered, as a representative system, is yet one of the finest institutions the world has seen for the preservation and union of freedom with order and stability, and for the advancement of rational and constitutional liberty.

Second, That considered as a school of political talent, it has presented to the country a succession of great, and eminent statesmen.

Third, That those partial irregularities, which render it not wholly the creation of the body of the people, give it a certain independence, which enables it to exercise a salutary influence over public opinion. It leads, instead of tamely following it. It corrects many hasty impressions, combats many prejudices, prevents many errors; it is the guardian of the interests, not the echo of the will of the people. It is composed of representatives, not of delegates.

Fourth, That in the progress of time, and particularly of late years, the House of Commons has become more free from every corrupt influence, and that those imperfections, for the removal of which Reform is principally demanded, are in fact greatly diminished.

Fifth, That it has always represented the best spirit of each succeeding age; and if it be now swept away, or undergo such extensive modification, as entirely to destroy its identity, its last acts will have been worthy of its long and noble career, it will have escaped the decay of time, and its existence will have terminated in the full meridian of its vigour, and in the performance of acts of great and permanent benefit to the country.

## SECTION V.

## EXAGGERATED EXPECTATIONS OF THE ADVANTAGES OF REFORM.

No topic of popular interest ever appears to have been made a more complete handle of, than this question of Parliamentary Reform. Political zealots and adventurers have found it the readiest theme for vague and inflammatory declamation, and the strongest lever of the passions of the people. They have applied themselves sedulously to heighten and exaggerate beyond all limits of credibility the two points upon which the force of their arguments rests, the evils of our actual condition, and the efficacy of their proposed remedy, till people are induced to suppose that, by an easy and rapid transition, the adoption of Reform will transport them from the extreme of human suffering to a state of unexampled prosperity and happiness. The more enlightened advocates of the principle, whose expectations are confined to reason and probability, and who are incapable of entertaining views so extravagant, or of professing what they do not believe, have yet negatively encouraged their propagation. They perceived that the cause which they warmly favoured was

supported by these means, and their candour did not go the length of inducing them to disavow such allies, to explain the precise bounds of their own more sober expectations, or to dispel the delusions which created so strong a tide in their favour. Such is, unhappily, an almost universal characteristic of party struggles. Men, whose real opinions, whose final aims and objects are wide as poles asunder, are too often ready to co-operate for some temporary purpose, and for the attainment of some party end. Such coalitions are rarely productive of good. Popular errors are dangerous, and unmanageable auxiliaries, and are apt to entangle those in their consequences who tolerate, that they may use them. A union of centres is generally the triumph of truth and moderation, an alliance with extremes is always hazardous. We begin with an idea that we can restrain, and bend them to our purpose; and we presently find ourselves in a position, when a middle course is no longer practicable, and when we have no other alternative than to go along with the crowd, without sharing their illusions, like the poor gentleman, who got by some accident into St. Luke's, and was found, by the keepers, in the act of dancing a minuet, very much against his will, with a madman.

The first error of these Reformers of the Utopian school, is an entirely false estimate of the influence of government upon society. They uniformly exaggerate its importance and effects, great as

they undoubtedly are. Granting their positions to their fullest extent, granting that our present is the very worst system of rule, and that their proposed changes would make it the most perfect that could be devised, we might still have ample cause to deny great part of their conclusions, we might still accuse them of encouraging unfounded hopes, because they anticipate benefits, which no form of government could bestow. In earlier and simple stages of society this proposition is sufficiently evident, since the relation of different parts, being of a less complex character, the evils which arise from misgovernment, and those which spring from other sources, are more easily traceable to their respective origin. A scarcity, or a plague, or the inroad of a foreign enemy, create as great a sum of human suffering, as the veriest tyranny that ever oppressed a nation; but there can be no confusion of causes in such cases. Our own highly artificial, and intricate social machinery, admits not of so easy an analysis. We cannot so readily determine which of our ills allows of alleviation, or cure, and which of them we must endure with patience. As an example, take the debate upon Mr. Littleton's introducing a bill for preventing the truck system, in December last. No reformed House of Commons, no purely elected set of Representatives possible, could have entered upon this discussion with a more zealous and impartial desire to apply the best remedy in their power to grievances affecting the working

classes in manufacturing counties of a very serious description, and the reality of which was generally admitted. There was no appearance in the House of any party feeling, the speakers rose from every side, expressing the greatest diversity of opinions, and without a possibility of being marshalled under any particular banner. The only bias, the only influence which could have been exercised over the judgment of Members, was precisely that which it would be the great object of reform to strengthen, viz. the influence of opinion out of doors, the fear that if they rejected the Bill, the motives of their opposition might be misconstrued; that they might be supposed indifferent to the evils of the truck system, instead of doubtful of the efficiency or the expediency of legislative interference. The motion for leave to bring in a bill was carried by a large majority, indeed it would have been a most ungracious proceeding towards the Honourable Mover, and towards the large population whose grievances he so clearly stated, to have rejected all consideration of a remedy. But those who attended to the debate will incline to the persuasion, that the existence of abuses was more satisfactorily made out, than the possibility of effectually removing them, or the policy of attempting to do so. I have no disposition to digress, by entering into the merits of the question, farther than to illustrate my position, that something more than integrity of intention is required, to cure all the diseases of our political condition.

The truck system is neither the only, nor the strongest instance of the existence of evils, which have arisen from causes quite independent of all government, or from past acts, the consequences of which we cannot now readily undo. The remedies for distress and want of employment of the labouring poor, the depression, at one time of the agricultural, at another of the commercial and manufacturing interests, the increasing burthen of poor's rates, the feverish state of Ireland, and various other temporary, or permanent sources of anxiety and discontent, form a catalogue of political problems, which no statesman or legislator has yet been enabled to solve. In many of these cases, no deficiency of good will, of inclination to adopt measures of alleviation or cure, can be supposed to exist; but the mode of accomplishing the object remains yet to be discovered. The various interests of the country are so thoroughly interwoven with each other, that it becomes almost impossible to relieve one, without injuring another, or to exact sacrifices from one, without inflicting a serious wound upon all. It is not that feasible plans for these purposes have been suggested from other quarters, and that the House has turned a deaf ear to them. They do not exist any where; political science and human ingenuity are at fault; and if a reformed House of Commons is to remove them, it must either be, by the adoption of some such daring and reckless course, that prudence and true patriotism shudders at, or by eliciting

some latent expedients, which have hitherto eluded the search not only of the legislature, but of all the intellect of the country.

It is easy to reply to such observations by vague common places about waste and profusion, boundless expenditure, retrenchment, economy, and the like; but such assertions are only deserving of the name of arguments, when they descend to particulars, and are founded upon some rational data. It discredits the advocates of practicable and definite retrenchment, to find themselves associated with such extravagant and unmeaning declarations; and it must damp their effort, to obtain those real and solid benefits, which some reduction in the amount, and some change in the mode of taxation, would confer upon the country, to find that all they could safely effect, must fall so infinitely short of these chimerical hopes, which must be ever doomed to disappointment.

A mere change in the constitution of the House of Commons, would not directly reduce either expenditure or taxation. Any House of Commons would have precisely the same materials to work upon. The difference must be occasioned by the manner of their going to work. We must first observe, that, particularly since the year 1823, much has been effected in the way of retrenchment, both by the Liverpool and Canning administration, and by that of the Duke of Wellington. It is evident that those who are first in

the field have a great advantage in a work of this kind. Those who begin to retrench will attack the most obvious abuses, will sacrifice the least useful offices, will lop off those glaring excrescences which stare them in the face. The next set will have to examine more narrowly into more concealed errors and faults; injurious practices, which elude the first observation, and lurk in the hidden labyrinths of the system; they will have to strike, in many cases, a balance between expence and utility, and sacrifice what is unquestionably of service, because it costs too much. In these doubtful cases, as in that of disbanding the Yeomanry Cavalry, for example, subsequent experience may give cause to regret the decision. A succeeding labourer in the field would find a still more scanty gleanings, a still more arduous task, more toil and less fruit, and the alternative either of effecting little, or of attacking what is really essential, might be still more strongly forced upon him. I am far from arguing that no means of retrenchment consistent with the public interest remain; I only assert, that the retrenchments which have been effected, and to a very considerable extent, inevitably diminish the amount of those which can still be made, and render the task of curtailing expenditure more difficult.

In the next place, we must remember that the interest of the national debt, which few of our theorists yet openly propose to sponge out, forms about one half of the public expenditure, which

narrows the extent upon which retrenchment can be practised to 27 or 28, instead of 54 or 55 millions. This half, having already undergone a reduction since 1822; and the increasing disposition of Parliaments, as at present composed, and particularly of the actual one, to enforce retrenchment, must be taken into account, so that the question is, not what a reformed Parliament would effect, but what a reformed Parliament would do, which this Parliament will not. And, lastly, we must not forget that there is an enormous amount of taxation for poor's rates, nearly eight millions, local rates one million and a half, and tithes, over which the House of Commons has no jurisdiction, perhaps about three and a half: these taxes are among the most burthensome in their operation, which, added to the national debt, leave about  $\frac{5}{8}$  of the application of the whole taxation of the country to be considered as a fixed charge, which could not be subjected to reduction.

Having gone through my argument upon this head, I shall take leave to present it again to my readers something in the form of an arithmetical statement, leaving it to Radical Algebraists to find the unknown quantity.

Given the whole amount of the taxation and expenditure of the country—Deduct  $\frac{5}{8}$  of that expenditure, a constant quantity.

Upon the remaining  $\frac{3}{8}$  make an allowance for

the retrenchment effected within the last eight years.

Required the amount of the difference of further retrenchment between a reformed and the present House of Commons.

Upon this subject I would avoid misapprehension. Economy is not only a duty in a Minister, it not only tends to allay popular ferment and dissatisfaction, but it does produce actual, substantial benefit to the country, considerably beyond the positive amount of taxes remitted. Experience has abundantly demonstrated that in the present state of England, a judicious remission of taxes has always given a considerable spur to the national industry, that the revenue has never proportionably suffered, but that the loss has been nearly compensated by the increased productiveness of other branches. Thus a diminution of expenditure is not only an immediate relief, but by the pressure it takes off the elastic resources of the country, gives a future hope of the same operation being again practicable. But this very circumstance is a strong motive for gradual reduction, which enables that to be accomplished easily, and with advantage to all, which, too violently attempted, might fail altogether, and cause a shock to credit, and great calamities. If a differently constituted House of Commons retrench gradually, it will do what this House has been doing, and will probably continue to do. If it

were to attempt any large and sudden reduction, it would injure the public service.

The beneficial effects of remission of taxes upon the revenue, and the impetus which it gives to consumption and production, seem much better established, than its efficiency in ameliorating the state of the labouring classes. The amount of taxes repealed, exceeding half the present income, within the last fifteen years, has been sufficiently large to produce some very sensible result, did it act upon their condition, in the manner we should be induced at first to hope. But observation has not verified these anticipations. The distress of the working classes seems increased in the agricultural districts, occasionally severe, though not constant in the manufacturing ones. The poor's rates, by the late returns, have greatly augmented; they are a million more in our present currency than they were in the depreciated one at the close of the war; and this total increase has taken place in spite of great local and partial reductions effected by a more vigilant and frugal application of them. The fluctuations in the manufacturing counties appear the inevitable consequences of those variations in the market which regulate the demand for labour, and are therefore almost out of the controul of governments. The more unvarying deterioration of the labouring agricultural poor, unchecked by the far greater proportionate amount of poor's rate expended upon them, not perceptibly affected by the reduc-

tion of taxes, leads us to infer that it arises from entirely other causes, and to augur that future diminution of taxes will avail but little to counteract them, or to effect any considerable improvement.

I have sought, in the preceding pages, to point out the error of those who expect great and sudden amelioration and benefit from a reform in Parliament, or from any imaginable change in the policy of the Government. If such a reform can be adopted, as, without creating any just apprehensions for the safety of the existing social system, shall give a new impulse to the Government in the course they have already entered upon—if, without incurring the fault of a dangerous precipitation, the march of legal and financial improvement can be rendered firmer and more rapid, important prospective advantages would result to the country. But the existence of any such flagrant misrule, any such intolerable abuses, as would occasion by their removal an instantaneous deliverance from the pressure of immediate evils, cannot be supposod to exist by any sober and well informed mind. The Government of this country has, for years, been acting upon enlightened and liberal principles, which have been sanctioned by the approval of all parties, and by the testimony of experience. Whatever further development their principles might receive, the effect would certainly be gradual, and the gain to the community in the commencement, scarcely felt. Exaggerated hopes must end in disappointment, and might lead to great calamities.

But there is another branch of this subject which may require some consideration, and upon which it is of the highest importance that just views should be entertained by the bulk of society. It is an examination of the probable consequences of measures which are as yet rather indirectly and covertly hinted at, than openly recommended. I would meet such opinions in their infancy, while they are still only insinuated, not avowed ; they should never be suffered to attain a dangerous maturity. I would never permit them to instil their mistaken, guilty, fatal maxims, into the public mind. I would not allow the concealment and incognito which they now affect, and are impatient for a favourable moment to throw off, to shelter their fallacies from detection, or their pernicious tendencies from exposure. I speak of plans of various kinds, of confiscation, of rapine, of inroads upon the rights of property, of fraud upon the public creditor. It is whispered, that property is in the hands of too few ; that the many suffer, while these few revel in enjoyment ; that the public debt was contracted in one currency, and is paid in another ; with other of those insidious suggestions, which are applied to stifle the voice of conscience in nations, as in individuals, and urge them on to crime.

It is averred, that the emergency of our situation, the intensity of our misery is such, that we can no longer wait for the slow operation of alterative remedies, and that we must have present relief. Abstract principles, it is said, must give way to the pressure of necessity, and the incubus of the monopoly of

wealth shaken off the oppressed nation. It is hoped that a reformed House of Commons will be more alive to this necessity, and more obedient to the will of the people, who must, in the mean time, be instructed to demand most energetically some of these decided measures. Thus, those, who admit that, by the application of ordinary means, the miracles they promise us cannot be performed, contend that reform will accomplish them by some of these bold, and original expedients.

Such dangerous and hollow doctrines are refuted by those incontrovertible truths, which are common to all nations and ages, that the rights of property are the foundation of society,—that no necessity justifies their violation ; it is like resorting to assassination, quite proscribed even in the laxest code of political morality. The rights of property benefit all, though not in an equal degree ; all are interested in their preservation,—all would suffer from their infringement. But if these general axioms, however established by experience, have, from their very universality, from their acknowledged justice, something of a trite and stale sound, they derive a new force, they assume an additional character of justice and validity, when considered with referenee to the peculiar circumstances of England. To those who would persuade us that hers is that particular case, authorising a departure from these maxims, I reply, that if they were good for no other State, they would be good for her alone ; that if there is a nation upon earth, whose prosperity, whose existence,

whose preservation from incalculable miseries, depend upon her adherence to them, England is that nation.

There is, first, no proof, either derived from our financial state, or from a general review of our condition, of any existing necessity offering a pretext for resorting to extremes. On this point, I shall take leave to quote two passages from Sir H. Parnell's work on Financial Reform,—a work no less cheering, than it is just and enlightened, and which has the high merit of rejecting those dark, and desponding views of our actual state, which are the favourite arguments of less candid and able reasoners. After some forcible remarks upon a sort of national hypochondria in politics, always leading the English to look at the dark side, and imagine themselves much worse off than they are, which he illustrates by some curious quotations from writers of the last century, he observes, “ With respect to what are called our “ financial difficulties, and about which so much alarm “ is felt, they are not so much present as prospective “ difficulties. The Treasury easily finds means for “ paying all demands upon it, and we may rest assured, “ that, whatever the difficulties may be under which “ the country is at present placed, they may be made “ to yield to sound principles of legislation.”\* And again, he quotes the opinion of Mr. Ricardo, sanctioning that high authority by his corroborating approval, —“ Notwithstanding the immense expenditure of “ the English Government during the last twenty years,

\* Financial Reform, page 13.

“ there can be little doubt but that the increased pro-  
 “ duction on the part of the people has more than  
 “ compensated for it. The national capital has not  
 “ merely been unimpaired, it has been greatly in-  
 “ creased ; and the annual income of the people, even  
 “ after the payment of their taxes, is, probably, greater  
 “ at the present time, than in any former period of our  
 “ history. For the proof of this, we might refer to the  
 “ increase of population, to the extension of agriculture,  
 “ to the increase of shipping and manufactures, to the  
 “ opening of numerous canals, as well as to many other  
 “ expensive undertakings, all denoting an immense  
 “ increase both of capital and annual production.”  
 To this Sir Henry adds, “ As ten years have elapsed  
 “ since Mr. Ricardo wrote this opinion, and as similar  
 “ proofs can be referred to, to shew a continual increase  
 “ of production, the conclusion is, that the national  
 “ capital and income are now much greater than they  
 “ were in 1819.”\*

Leaving the support of this part of my argument  
 to such high authority, and such convincing state-  
 ments, I shall proceed to notice another current  
 opinion, that property in this country is in the hands  
 of too few. It is not true that property in this coun-  
 try is in the hands of a few. The principal nobility,  
 the chief commercial men, the leading manufacturers,  
 are in the possession of colossal fortunes ; but it is a  
 gross error that they monopolize all property. In  
 each of the great divisions of national wealth to which  
 they respectively belong, to which we may add the

\* Financial Reform, page 17.

liberal professions, there is a regular gradation of riches, of affluence, of competence, and of independence, each embracing a numerous class, and altogether constituting a larger proportion of the population in the possession of property, compared with the aggregate number of the whole, than exist at this time in any other country in the world, or than probably ever did exist. There are more great fortunes, and more small fortunes,—more men of £100,000. per annum, and of £20,000., and £10,000., and £5,000., and £500., and £100., and £50., than could be found in any other part of the globe; and none of these classes appear to trench upon another, since there is a proper and relative proportion of each. If, therefore, the institution of property is beneficial to society generally, to no society is it so beneficial as to the English, since no where is it so widely diffused.

If we examine the causes of this state of things, we shall find that they are of a peculiar, and principally of a moral, rather than a physical nature. Should we contrast our condition with that of our great neighbour, France, we find that she possesses a much larger and more compact territory, a more central European position, a greater fertility of soil, and variety of natural productions. Her population is far more numerous. How has it arisen that the internal wealth, and prosperity of England has greatly exceeded that of France, that she has woven a larger tissue, out of a smaller raw material? Her insular position, and maritime advantages, may have been

some compensation for the other physical superiorities of her mighty rival; but the principal causes of her greatness, have been the intelligence, and energy of her people, the excellence of her institutions, the honour, stability, and good faith of her government, and the long immunity from internal war, whether foreign or domestic, the perfect repose and security, which she has enjoyed. These inestimable benefits have inspired universal confidence in the nation, have enabled them to extend every operation upon the basis of credit, and to calculate surely and justly upon the future. Now, coupled with the honest pride which Englishmen may justly indulge in, while contemplating these great and glorious results, in feeling that we have done more with our five talents, than other nations with their ten, we must carry this qualifying circumstance, that as our prosperity is more the work of human wisdom, ingenuity, and integrity, and less the consequence of natural advantages, a more artificial character belongs to it. It is not the spontaneous creation of the fields, it is not the unvarying attribute of material force, it is a fabric of human structure, and its maintenance depends upon the continued operation of the causes which have called it into being. We do not think it less secure on this account, because we believe in the permanence of these moral ingredients, but its nature requires a more watchful and anxious care; and were it unhappily destroyed, we fear the ruin would be complete and irretrievable. Were we to suffer our "high blown" prosperity "to burst under us," we should

fall, "like Wolsey, never to hope again." The storms of revolution, and the tide of war, have rolled over France, but she is still great and progressive. We fear that in a similar trial, England would sustain irreparable evil. The works of nature are more pregnant with life than those of man. The corn field, the vine, and the olive, still clothe the sides of Vesuvius, but Herculaneum and Pompeia are destroyed for ever.

The national debt is one of the objects, for example, of these covert attacks. We will not dwell upon the individual misery which any violation of faith with the public creditor would scatter through the land; we will not dwell upon the description of persons whom any such measure would affect, the widow's jointure, the younger childrens portion, the retired shopkeeper's little competence, the provision against age and want, saved from the earnings of a life of honest and laborious servitude. Passing over these private considerations, let us regard it in a purely public point of view. Upon the national debt depend all the security and solvency of the great mercantile establishments, of the whole body of Bankers, of the Insurance Offices of all descriptions, of the Savings Banks in every part of the country. The first indication of a disposition to invade its sacred claims, would be the signal for a universal panic, for a suspension of those commercial pulses, which propel the life blood through the veins of the state.

We have had one faint experience, one little ex-

ample, on a small scale, of the tremendous consequences of such a revulsion in credit. In 1825, we all recollect the public opinion was strongly pronounced in favour of a variety of schemes and speculations of a very hazardous and extravagant nature. Those who believe that the public opinion is not always infallible; those who, committing treason against the sovereignty of the people, think that it is in the nature of things that some should lead, and that others should follow, whether to good, or to evil, assert, that a portion of the public led the rest of the public into a great scrape. Certain it is, that a number of these schemes were unsuccessful, and that they occasioned the failure of two or three London houses of considerable note, though not of the very first eminence, and of a great many country Banks. We must all remember the disastrous consequences of this shock to credit, the alarm universally spread, the sudden alteration of trade and manufactures from a thriving to a most disastrous state. Trifling and partial as this crisis must be regarded, compared with the slightest breach of the great national faith, it will be long referred to as a period of great calamity, of public alarm and despondency, of general and acute distress.

But were illustrations required of the unavoidable evils occasioned by all great changes, however absolutely required, and however prudently and temperately conducted, let us turn our eyes to a more recent instance, that of France, within the last six months. It is worth while to premise what all per-

sons acquainted with that country know, that the transactions of trade and commerce are there conducted on a more limited scale than with us. Credit is much less extensive, paper not generally in circulation: the whole system narrower, simpler, more confined than ours, and therefore not so liable to be affected by panics or reverses. Yet let us mark the consequences of late events upon the trade and internal prosperity of that country.

If ever there were a revolution justified, and rendered a duty by the conduct of the Government, the Revolution of July was that one. Nor was the conduct of the people less admirable than their motive was justifiable. No drop of blood was wantonly, or unnecessarily spilled; no cruelty stained their victory; no mixture of sordid deeds, no acts of rapine or robbery, corrupted the purity of their cause. The authority of the laws was but a moment relaxed, the new government was instantly invested with the powers of the State. There was no protracted struggle; the ascendancy of good sense, and moderation was every where maintained; the nation seemed instantaneously to re-enter that state of calmness and repose, which had been momentarily disturbed. Could a change of this nature take place in any country, without affecting its internal prosperity and its trade; the recent revolution in France, from its short duration, from its exemplary moderation, from the judicious and patriotic hands into which the government fell, and from that absence of an extended system of credit, would have entitled

us to hope such a result. But the consequences have been less agreeable to contemplate. Evils, which, however the excellent spirit of the people intitles us to hope, and believe will be of short and temporary duration, have yet clouded the brightness of the prospect, and introduced afflicting sufferings into the land. The spirit of disorganization, and anarchy has been unchained ; and though compressed, and checked by the firm good sense of the nation, has scattered through it doubt and alarm. The operations of industry have been suspended, the workmen have been exposed to great privations, and the productive powers of the nation have been checked. It must awaken the sympathy and regret of every friend of liberty, that the commercial failures and distresses which have taken place in Paris, have reached men, whose names are known as the warmest and truest friends of freedom ; who have been ever foremost in its cause, and who would have purchased that triumph with their lives, which they are doomed to see followed by the entire ruin of their fortunes. Let us admire the French, but let us rejoice that we are not obliged to redeem our liberties at such a price ; and let us remember, that the best, wisest, and justest revolution, is always a calamity.

Reverting to the subject of the extreme sensitiveness of our own system, and of the disastrous consequences of any invasion of rights, we may observe, that upon the great mercantile and banking establishments, before enumerated, depend all the manu-

facturing and commercial interests of the country. Were they to be affected, all our power looms would be arrested, our steam engines would stand still, our ships would rot in our harbours, the retail trade would be reduced, the whole industry of the country would be paralysed. Nor would the agricultural interests escape better. Besides the direct loss sustained by landed proprietors, through their connexion with the Bankers, it is sufficiently proved, that the demand for agricultural produce follows, at no remote interval, the state of our trade and manufactures; that one depends upon the other. Lastly, let not the labouring classes be taught to suppose, that such violent changes can be calculated, in the remotest degree, to better their condition. The property of England may be destroyed by force, but it cannot be diffused; it is like one of our machines, of too delicate a texture. It is not that A obtains what he attempts to take from B; it will perish. The labourer will not cultivate the field he has wrested from the farmer; it will lie fallow; the weaver will not move his shuttle the faster within his own cottage, because the manufactory of his master is shut up. Here again we may refer to the panic of 1825. At the beginning of that year every thing was flourishing and prosperous in a high degree; at the close of it the failures took place. In the spring of 1826, the weavers and manufacturers were almost universally out of employment, and in a state of destitution. Alarming riots took place, factories were burned, machinery destroyed,

and soldiers called out; lives lost at Manchester, Blackburn, Wigan, &c., throughout the manufacturing districts. If that capital, which animates the whole, be destroyed; or if that system of credit, which alone renders such complicated and extensive operations possible, be once dissolved, the first and greatest sufferers would be the whole vast manufacturing population, whose existence entirely depends upon this mighty and artificial machinery. If they are unhappily exposed now to great privations, from the unavoidable fluctuations which must always occur in the demand for the productions of manufacturing industry, what would be their state in the event of a total check to the whole process of production, an entire derangement of those powers by which it is impelled and set in motion.

The poor also have their national debt, their six millions and a half of rates, levied upon the annual income of the State. What would be the fate of this tax in the event of any national revulsion? Would the collector's be an easy task, making the circuit of the parish, presenting his rapidly augmenting demands with a smile and a bow, and receiving the ready forthcoming amount into his capacious canvass bag? Would not the rate payers be constantly converted into the rate receivers? Would not the arm of the law be wearied with enforcing his numerous distresses on goods and chattels; an operation, which, like a fictitious and delusive sinking fund, for the extinction of poverty, ruins with one hand, that it may relieve with the other? Let them be convinced,

that the poor's rates would not survive such a convulsion; and that they, whose existence is a mortgage on property, are, above all others, interested in its preservation. I have instanced the national debt as the readiest illustration of the pernicious consequences of these extreme, and subversive measures; but the same effects would flow from any other attack, directed against the integral parts of our social edifice. I would not be accused of colouring a picture with the darkest shades of an "invalid imagination." I know and acknowledge, that I am painting an extreme case, but I am supposing those extreme measures which would realize it. There is no fear that we should voluntarily encounter such horrible misfortunes; since doing so, would be a perfectly gratuitous act. I believe, that the nation is, as it has always been, sober, discreet, and wise. I merely point out the possible results of an access of national delirium.

This section has led me into some length; and I hope that my readers will not have entirely lost sight of the positions I have been desirous of establishing;—

First, That it is a great error, and will lead to much disappointment, to suppose that any rational reform could effect such a change in the policy of the executive, as materially and immediately to improve the condition of the empire, or of any class of its population. The advantages arising from an amelioration of the system would undoubtedly be of a gradual, and at first, almost an imperceptible nature. They

would rather consist of a certain change in the tone and spirit of the House of Commons, than of any benefits of a substantive character.

Second, That if it is imagined that a reformed House of Commons would proceed to effect its objects by more decisive acts, disregarding those rights which have hitherto been held sacred, it would be the author of the most cruel calamities. Should it be clearly pointed out, should it be even reasonably apprehended, that a reform would have such a tendency, it would become the duty, not only of every one charged with the weighty responsibility of a seat at this time in Parliament, but of every honest, wise, and prudent man throughout the nation, to oppose it, as he would avoid the deep guilt of assisting in the ruin of his country.

## SECTION VI.

## VOTE BY BALLOT.

THE advantages of the system of vote by ballot, appear to me a very fair induction from the doctrine of the Sovereignty of the People. If we admit the principle of an inherent right, vested in the majority of the population, or the fact of the great ends of government having been uniformly best attained in proportion as we have approached nearer its practical application, it then only remains to consider Vote by Ballot, with regard to its being well adapted, or otherwise to elicit the unbiassed expression of that will. And certainly it does appear, that if it be an advantage to separate the actions of men, as political agents, from all those influences which guide their conduct as social beings, vote by ballot has the merit of being a most ingenious device for the accomplishment of that end. It will probably make as near an approach to the attainment of it, as any mode which could be invented for a purpose, counteracting so strongly motives of action, which are a part of our nature.

I am disposed to admit, that vote by ballot is as good a method as could have been proposed for obtaining the pure unmixed expression of the will of

each individual, and therefore of the majority of the whole. I dispute not the efficacy of the means, I contend against the expediency of the end. Let us allow that vote by ballot would destroy the influence of property and station, that it would even diminish that sway which intellect and energy exercise over mental weakness and timid obstinacy. I still doubt the wisdom of thus insulating our political existence, of sending the elector to the poll exonerated from all those motives, which influence his every other act as a member of the community. It would dissolve the cement which binds and unites the social system.

Should we succeed in excluding the slightest external bias, or feeling of personal interest, from the mind of the elector, is the advantage so indisputable? We shall not have overcome these motives by moral causes, by increasing the weight of higher motives of action; we shall only have eluded and evaded them by a slight of hand, by a *ruse de guerre*.

Are we sure that we have eradicated all the deteriorating and injurious influences within his breast? If his vote is no longer in the remotest degree dictated by his interest, is it equally unbiassed by his passions, his prejudices, or his ignorance?

Will not envy and hatred sometimes find a secure vent in the concealed drawers of the balloting box? Will virtue and talent be always his choice? By the ballot at Athens, Aristides was banished, because he was called the just.

Vote by ballot, if coupled with an extended right of suffrage, would undoubtedly destroy the ascen-

dancy of the upper classes. I do not mean to use the term in the restricted sense in which it has an unpopular and invidious acceptance. I do not mean the narrow limit of the nobility, or the landed proprietors, or the possessors of large fortunes. I speak of that great division of English society, stretching from the very highest possessors of hereditary or acquired importance, quite down to the confines of what is called middle life. It includes all those who either possess a competence, or who derive one from the exercise of an honourable and liberal calling or profession. It comprizes the flower of the intellect, and probity, and educated portion of the community. However inferior in numbers to the next great division, that of the middle classes, it is even numerically important. When considered relatively to its position, and its mental superiority, it is the leading influence in the State. Granting that vote by ballot, a franchise generally extended to the great provincial towns, and a low qualification in the electors, should entirely destroy this influence, would the benefit to the country be quite incontestable? There may be those who are sceptical enough to doubt whether the power thus enjoyed by the most intelligent, and most virtuous part of the nation, is upon the whole a defect. There are some reformers who think it ought rather to be increased than diminished. There is an opinion that the entire population of Birmingham, or of Manchester, would not, if giving their votes by ballot, free as air, as their prepossessions, or their caprices, or their prejudices, or the best lights of

their understanding might dictate, be more likely to choose well, from the absence of this sort of influence. It would appear to resemble the improvement which would be effected by any subtle physiologist, who should contrive to release the limbs and members of the human body from the controul of mental volition.

The advocates of vote by ballot constantly cite, as an example, the recent history of France, and exclaim, with triumph, "The ballot has saved France." They forget that the elective franchise in that country was exercised by 84,000 electors, chosen by a qualification, which secured their being among the richest and most independent class in their population of thirty-three millions. Such a mode of voting might have been exceedingly useful as a defence to their limited electoral body, against the intrigues and menaces of the plotting and arbitrary ministers of Charles X.; but the difference between the two cases is this. The right of election in France was in the hands precisely of that class, who, as far as two very different states of society can be compared, correspond to that part of the English nation, whose influence in elections I have been contending, is beneficial. It is allowed on all hands that they used their franchise wisely and well. It would be too much for the most strenuous supporter of the ballot to assert, that all the merit was due to it, and none whatever to the men. Therefore these events were highly favourable to the character and public conduct of the portion of the nation answering to that part of the British people,

whom I would wish to see continuing to possess a leading voice in the choice of members. It is not desired that, as in France, they should have the whole elective franchise, only a considerable weight. But vote by ballot in England would be a weapon levelled against these very persons. It would be adopted with no other view than that of extinguishing them entirely, politically speaking. Vote by ballot in France was a power confided to the hands of the upper classes in the sense in which I have used the words. In England it would be a power directed against them.

It must be admitted that the practice of bribery at elections would be much diminished, and rendered more difficult, by the introduction of such a mode of voting. This would no doubt be a considerable advantage attending it. It would, however, be too dearly purchased, by the destruction of all those legitimate influences which are interwoven with the whole frame work of civilized life, and which are the great bond of its adhesion.

In pursuing the chimera of abstract rights, or the phantom of an ideal independence, these political visionaries lose sight of all ultimate ends. They reject experience, they disregard the conclusions founded upon history and human nature. They fancy that they have found the *summum bonum* of legislation, the *beau ideal* of civil government, because, in the performance of an important social act, they have contrived a means of emancipating men from all those restraints which surround them as social beings.

They think that in a system, the very essence and beauty of which is the responsibility of all the depositaries of power, and their subjection to the controul of opinion, they can, in the exercise of this one essential power, safely and beneficially release men from all check and responsibility whatever.

## SECTION VII.

APPREHENSIONS OF A SERIES OF PARLIAMENTARY  
REFORMS.

THERE is a numerous portion of the best informed ranks of the community, perhaps the majority of them, whose opinions on Reform may be thus rendered.

We are sensible of considerable imperfections in our present mode of representation. We think that some of the highest and wealthiest families in the State have too great and direct a power of nominating members. We lament that so much disorder and venality should disfigure our elections. We should cordially approve of measures of Reform calculated to soften, or to remove these blemishes. But we see considerable difficulties in the accomplishment of these limited objects. We venerate our Constitution as a whole. We admire its free spirit, its long tried merits, its attainment of that difficult result, the union of civil and personal liberty, with order, with a good and a strong government. We totally dissent from those accusations brought against our political system, representing it as a radically bad, venal, and profligate one. We cannot trace all the evils with which we are afflicted, or with which we ever

have been afflicted, to its errors and faults. We think, on the contrary, that it is, taken altogether, the best which has ever stood the test of a century. We have experienced its advantages and its blessings. We think that they far outbalance its defects. Though we should be glad to cure them, we do not desire to run great risk of destroying the whole in the attempt. We would rather have the defects than the risk. We do not feel disposed to venture all that we enjoy on the desperate chances of a political speculation.

Those who reason and who feel thus, and they are many, must inevitably be alarmed at the prospect, not of one Reform, the consequences of which they can estimate, but of a long series of Reforms. They perceive that if they, like kind, yet clear sighted friends, wish to amend the Constitution, there is a numerous party of fierce foes, who seek only to destroy it. They see that this Reform is but a first step, to be followed by a number of others, which lead they know not whither. Those who think that great changes in governments are evils, only to be incurred for some definite and important benefit, are startled to find that they are to be exposed to a succession of changes, intended gradually to effect a complete transformation. They conceive that the final aim of these successive reforms, always tending to infuse an increasing portion of democracy into the Constitution, could be no other than the establishment of a pure republic.

Under such circumstances, the question of Reform

presents itself in a totally different point of view. It is no longer whether this or that plan of Reform is good *per se*, but what will be the position in which the different parties will stand to each other, should it be adopted. We must calculate our means of resistance, we, who do not wish to establish a Republic, or to introduce into our government a principle of indefinite and incessant change, must endeavour to estimate what would be the effect of this first measure upon the relative strength of parties.

We should regard it as a final one, others would consider it as a commencement: Which would be right? It seems evident that there is a party, and a considerable one, whom no concession would satisfy, who would look upon all they could obtain now, as a means of obtaining more hereafter. There are many who have declared war against the Constitution, either avowedly or secretly, who assail it with every engine, and with whom its friends could make no alliance. There are others who, though they do not go so far, are yet exceedingly desirous of a much greater alteration of the representative system, than it is likely will now be proposed. These two parties, however they may separate afterwards, will unite to a certain point. They will pull together till they reach the place where the latter intend to stop. Now, were it once proved that the passing of any measure of Reform would have the effect of strengthening these two parties, and of facilitating the attainment of their ultimate objects, I think the moderate and temperate friends of the Constitution, whose opinions I have been de-

scribing, would, to a man, unite against any Reform. We do not think our frame of Government so bad as to induce us to surrender it to a succession of experiments. We do not desire that our social system should be indefinitely unsettled. We dread the alterative processes of these empirics. Revolution does not appear to us in a less repulsive form, because, instead of an acute distemper, it is to wear us with the wasting pangs of a chronic disease.

It is impossible to conceal from ourselves, however, that it will be exceedingly difficult to carry any measure of Reform which will not have a tendency to strengthen these pernicious influences. It will be difficult to frame any plan so prudently, or to introduce it so temperately, and so firmly, as not to give to these extreme parties an impression of triumph, and a persuasion of something extorted. They will gain a certain accession of moral power, they will be inspired with fresh confidence, and they will suppose that they can gradually wring from the country in detail the full extent of their objects.

I confess, it appears to me that Reform should have a twofold object ; while it aims at a correction of the blemishes mentioned above, it should guarantee the great body of the nation, all who have an interest in the permanence of Government, or the tranquillity and repose of private life, against the perpetual recurrence of this insatiable and reckless spirit of change. Nothing can be clearer than that it will not stop of itself. It will either go on till it completely subverts every national institution, or it must be

arrested by some stronger influence. The energy of the Government is one principal agent for this purpose, and the moral force derived from the good sense of the people the other. The species of security against wild innovations, which I allude to, must consist in discovering in what part of the community this good sense exists in its purest and most unalloyed force, and in so adapting reform as to strengthen its expression, and add to its weight in the legislature.

I would remark, that the innovating and revolutionary spirit of change I hold up as dangerous, is very distinct from that sober and rational desire of ameliorating ancient institutions, which has already produced such beneficial effects. The latter adheres to the outline of our venerable Constitution, takes it as the basis, which must be preserved and strengthened, and only seeks to adapt it skilfully to the altered circumstances and wants of the present age. The former is bent on destroying it. They are as different as Sir J. Wyatteville repairing and beautifying Windsor Castle, is from Martin the incendiary, who burned York Minster.

The very worst government is perhaps better than the constant agitation produced by incessant changes in the most essential forms ; at any rate, it is the most frequent termination of them. England is so entirely unsuited for a Republic, that it needs no very extended political vision to foretell that the denouement of these ultra Reformers' political drama would be an absolute monarchy. In the meantime,

what a wreck of national prosperity and happiness would not these fierce party struggles occasion ! Heaven avert the hour, when an English Minister should re-echo the sentiment lately wafted to us across the Irish channel, and declare that “ England wants repose.”

## SECTION VIII.

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ENGLISH ARISTOCRACY.

ARISTOCRACY is a particularly sonorous and high sounding word. It is also a convenient one. It classes, under one general term, a variety of different meanings, and throws upon the hearer the burthen of decyphering the particular sense in which it is used. It is likewise an expression agreeable to the feelings, and flattering to the self-love of a powerful and distinguished class in the community. It has lately been converted into a term of abuse, a rallying point, a magic form of invocation of the angry and hostile passions of a large portion of the population. In this latter acceptance it has been the parent of a number of titles of a similarly classic derivation; such as the oligarchy, the squirearchy, the parsonarchy, and other compound words, containing an equal proportion of Greek and English, of Demosthenes and Cobbett. It is quite intelligible, that, with such recommendations, it should have been received into general currency, and should have become a favourite with the speakers and the writers of the day. It is nevertheless certain, that in the general and popular meaning in which it is now

used, it is a recent importation into our vocabulary. It will appear too, that, like all foreign words, applied to the nice and peculiar characteristics of national manners, like all these sweeping terms, which pretend to express every thing with five syllables, it conveys indistinct and erroneous ideas. It is not merely, that it does not shew us the shades and details of the body of the picture, it is radically defective in the outline, which it attempts to convey to us. The images, that it presents to the mind, are confused, and false. I really believe, that much of evil has arisen to the country from this word. It has led to unfounded and invidious views, and pretensions in one class. It has awakened morbid dissatisfaction, sullen discontent, fierce and deadly resentment in others. It has been the apple of discord among us. When we speak of the Aristocracy of ancient Venice, or of Berne, any one acquainted with the nature of those Republics, knows exactly what is meant, but nobody can annex the same precise meaning to the term English Aristocracy. Its vagueness has been favourable to indefinite assumption on the one hand, and to indefinite but virulent attack upon the other. In order to explain myself more clearly, I would induce my readers to follow me in some observations upon the nature and past history of the English nobility and gentry, and of their actual relations to the rest of the community.

We all know that the order of the peerage traces its origin to the feudal times, and its earliest men-

bers were the proud and powerful nobles of the middle ages. We know, that in the wars of the Roses, and under the tyranny of Henry the Eighth, the power of these Barons was broken, and the families of many became extinct. Their ranks were recruited by Elizabeth and James from the flower of the gentry, but their independent, and almost princely authority, was finally destroyed. An interval seems to have occurred between the reduction of this species of separate dominion, and the revival of their importance as a corporate political body. But during this period, when they were the submissive vassals of Henry the Eighth, or the obedient servants of Elizabeth, there was still something that preserved the *prestige* of their name, and a considerable portion of their personal consequence. There ran through all the monarchies of feudal origin a certain sympathy between the throne and the nobles. They were like husband and wife; however they might quarrel and fight, they never could resolve to carry things to the last extremity; they always contrived to be reconciled in the end. No usurpation of the crown by a subject was ever permanently successful; and, however Henry and Elizabeth might determine to subdue, they never sought to degrade their nobility. The political importance, therefore, which they subsequently attained as a separate portion of the Parliament, was grafted upon the recollections of their former greatness, and upon the dignity and estimation which they still preserved. It was fortified too by the consideration

and favour of the crown, no longer jealous of their distinct jurisdictions; and it was supported by the reality of great wealth, of the most solid and enduring kind. When we consider, that the feudal system, wherever it was established, has left the most lasting traces in the habits and modes of thinking of the European nations; and when we observe, how many of the more modern elements of personal consequence, were grafted upon these ancient recollections, the importance of the peerage, down to our days, is a matter of easy explanation.

But however this association of feudal recollections, with the substantial attributes of wealth and political power, may have invested the peerage as a whole, with much of its lustre, we must not look to find them often united in the peerage individually. The peerages which survived the convulsions of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, were few in number; and of these few some families became extinct in the course of nature. From these periods, down to our own, the peerage has been largely recruited in every age from the ranks of the landed gentry, of the most distinguished families, originally connected with commerce, of the highest legal functionaries, of successful political intriguers, and of those who rendered important services to their country in the senate and the field. Little of its original composition remains, although its original character is preserved. We see, therefore, that, however distinguished, the peerage has never, in modern times, formed a body entirely separated from the gentry. It has constantly

been replenished from among them, it has been connected with them by marriage, it has pursued with them the same objects, it has been united with them by a thousand ties.

If we next ask the nature and limit of the term gentry, it is less capable of an exact definition; the precise boundaries are not so clearly marked out. Like the peerage, it has a feudal origin; and as the first peers were the Barons, the first gentlemen were the Knights, whose name recalls all the best and noblest part of those dark and turbulent times. Less corrupted by the possession of uncontrouled and inordinate power, and raised above the coarse brutality of an unenlightened age, by the singular institutions and noble spirit of chivalry, this class appears to have been the depositaries of all the highest qualities of their time. When the restraints of law were weak, when each individual was surrendered so much to the dominion of his own inclinations and passions, it would be too much to suppose that the Knights were always the representatives of the principles they professed. Violence, fraud, and cruelty, the vices of their age, no doubt were abundantly frequent in their rank. Still there was in the spirit and institutions of chivalry, a freedom from selfishness, an elevation and delicacy of sentiment, a lofty and generous sense of personal respect, which invested them with a moral grandeur. They proscribed what was mean, base, and sordid. They inculcated honour, truth, fidelity, and courage. They enjoined the protection of the weak, and the succour of the

oppressed. Even in their tone of hyperbole, and exaggeration, there is something of dignity; it is an imitation—a burlesque one if you will, of what is in itself great and noble. We may find a confirmation of this in the inimitable work of Cervantes. The most accomplished satire extant, attacks it in a playful, not a hostile spirit. We smile at the extravagancies of the hero, but we respect and esteem his character. The author has depicted the aberrations of an amiable and generous nature.

I have referred the origin of the gentry, like that of the peerage, to the feudal times. From those times they have inherited many of the qualities which we usually annex to the idea of a gentleman, a grace and dignity of manner, a high sense of self respect, a peculiar delicacy of honour. But like the peerage, even more than the peerage, have they changed in the actual composition. Much of the tone has been preserved, but the qualification has never been in the proofs of lineal descent. The human body, it has been supposed, changes every particle of its frame in the course of seven years, yet the spiritual identity remains. In the same manner many of the best characteristics of ancient chivalry form the foundation of, and still survive in the class of modern gentry, although few of their ancestors ever went to the crusades, or broke a lance in a tournament. From this point, and in this class, are we to trace the great difference between English manners and character, and that of the continental nations. While

the latter clung to heraldic forms, to rigid proofs of descent, to artificial distinctions, and therefore only obtained from this stock of knighthood, and chivalry, a withered, stunted offspring of provincial, petty, secondary noblesse, we took a totally different course. The original foundation was common to all, but we built upon it very differently. Retaining a certain value for family and descent, we wisely rejected too close an adherence to these strict rules. Our patent of admission was more in the soul and spirit than in the quarterings, was more a moral than an heraldic qualification. The ranks of the English gentry were widely and liberally opened to receive all those who became distinguished by successful enterprize and talent, who attained fortune by honourable means, who won eminence by intellect and exertion. Ours was an expansive, theirs an exclusive spirit. They decreed that no man who was not "*gentilhomme*," should enter the army; we resolved that every officer of the army and navy was *de facto* a gentleman. They condemned the learned professions of law and medicine to a marked inferiority, we paid a generous respect to the high talents they require. They disdained and rejected the least mixture of commerce, we welcomed cordially those enterprising and enlightened men, who, in acquiring great wealth to themselves, conferred great benefit on their country. They preserved the narrowness, the prejudices of feudality, we caught and diffused its best spirit. They copied the castes of the Hindus, we imitated

the sagacious policy of the former mistress of the world, who conferred upon the incorporated nations the lofty privileges of Roman citizens.

It followed, from these different courses, that while the great and little noblesse of the continent became an extremely obnoxious body, and were gradually undermined by the increasing wealth and intelligence of the rest of the community, the composition of our gentry was totally different. Their ranks included not merely all that was illustrious in descent, but the most affluent in fortune, respectable in station, honourable in character, distinguished by professional ability, pre-eminent in intellectual merit, throughout the country. They blended the highest acquirements of civilization with ennobling feelings, derived from their chivalrous parentage. There was in this distinction nothing that was invidious, nothing that was oppressive, nothing that curbed or injured freedom. It is a profoundly marked national line, and is viewed with no national hostility by any part of the people. In its most popular signification, the word gentleman is never used in a bad sense, it never conveys an unfavourable impression. It is so exclusively national, that it has no corresponding term in the other languages of Europe, and all the niceties of expression must be resorted to, if we wish to explain its meaning to a foreigner. The most violent demagogue seldom ventures to assail it with his terms of invective and reproach; he knows that he should not easily excite the sympathy of his hearers. The lowest classes always annex to it a mixed meaning of

character and of station. The readiest term of vulgar abuse, is, to tell a person of respectable situation that he is no gentleman, meaning that he wants the moral qualities which ought to accompany his rank in life. They are right. An English gentleman generally justifies their impression of this necessary union. Were I, without previous knowledge of the individual, obliged to place boundless confidence in the honour and integrity of another, I would select through the world an English gentleman.

If I have been at all successful in describing my impressions of these characteristic divisions of the upper classes of English society, my objections to the term aristocracy will be easily understood. A nobility so mixed and blended with the gentry, cannot possess that separate and exclusive quality necessary to complete the idea of an aristocracy. In a government of a purely aristocratic nature, like Molière's "*Tout ce qui n'est pas vers est prose*," all who were not aristocrats would be democrats. But the great body of the gentry is far too extended in numbers, and far too popular in its composition, to be classed as an aristocracy. They are equally removed from all affinity to democracy. We must therefore reject the Greek derivatives, as not at all applicable to the shades of our national ranks, and recur to words of more familiar use.

The events of the last sixty or seventy years have caused important changes in the individual composition both of the Peerage, and of the gentry, but their proportionate relations to each other, and to the rest of the

community, have not been substantially altered. During this memorable period, the conquest of our eastern empire, the vast extension of our national debt, the immense increase of our commerce and manufactures, the various roads to distinction and preferment opened by the late war, all thronged the ranks of the gentry with a sudden and prodigious accession of numbers and wealth. The same sudden and large infusion of new materials, has equally taken place in the ranks of the peerage. The causes were very similar. The same acquisition of added importance, wealth, and power, by the class immediately below them, the same movement and action of the whole nation, through the exciting struggles of the war. Perhaps something may be ascribed to the particular policy of Pitt. It may partly reconcile some of his opponents to the memory of that celebrated statesman, that he appears to have been peculiarly free from prejudices in favour of rank and title. His lofty pride, like that of his distinguished father, appears to have been of a strictly personal nature. Emerging from the ranks of the private gentry, and owing his greatness to his own vast powers, and to the splendid talents of his father, the dim coronet, which late, and in his decline, encircled the brows of the first Earl of Chatham, seems to have inspired no very lively sympathy for the order in the breast of his son. It is curious to mark the difference in this respect, between him and his great rival, and to note how variously passions, feelings, and opinions, are chequered in the mind of man. Pitt the idol, and the cham-

pion of the Tories, in the simple austerity of his manners, in his contempt for the adventitious decorations of high station, in his ready appreciation and production of talents, reminds us, in some points, rather of the President of a Republic. Fox, the warm and eloquent defender of popular rights, was, in private life, the assiduous votary of the pleasures of rank and fashion, and seems to have had always a greater leaning towards the advantages of high birth and connexion, than he would have cared to avow even perhaps to himself. It is certain, that, in fact, Pitt was the firm and liberal patron of ability, wherever he discovered it. The names of Huskisson, and of Canning, will attest his discernment to posterity. In the opposition of that period, eminent talent was made the tool of party; Pitt rendered it the associate and heir of his power.

In his lavish distribution of the patronage of the crown, by the creation of new titles, Pitt was, perhaps, influenced in part by an indifference for the honours he gave. Certain it is, that the composition of the House of Lords was materially altered by the infusion of such a vast number of new peers.

However, it must be owned, that, as a body, it was rather strengthened, than injured, by the accession of so many recruits, generally chosen among individuals of large fortune, of political influence, or of eminent personal qualities. As a whole, their consideration was rather augmented; on the one hand, it is true, that a peer was not quite so rare a phenomenon, the distinction was a less marked one

than it had been fifty years ago; but, on the other, they had acquired the strength of numbers, and of added wealth. Their *esprit de corps* too, was still preserved, and they had the force of union.

From these circumstances it has arisen, that the indirect influence of the peerage, in the Lower House, has sensibly augmented within the last twenty years. The great riches of some of their body have been directed gradually to the purchase of many close seats, formerly at the disposal of private gentlemen. A Radical Reformer would probably observe, that so long as the corruption existed, it was immaterial to the people who exercised it. Practically, however, it is a matter of some consequence, that a great transfer has taken place from one class to another. The events of the same period have, I think, lessened the importance of the gentry as a political body. The creation of so many peers, robbed them of several influential members; jealousies existed among themselves; the transfer of close boroughs to the peerage closed many of their avenues to consideration; and the fastidiousness, and spirit of exclusiveness, which few, acquainted with our society, can have failed to notice, also was a powerful agent. It tended to destroy their identity as a class. The most distinguished among them were enrolled, and incorporated with the societies of the nobility; and the great mass, consisting of all those who fill the unobtrusive ranks of private life, the learned and liberal professions, the majority of the army and navy, perhaps became partially divided by a spirit

of this kind, from the more brilliant members of that class, of which they are essentially a part.

Those who admire, in most of its parts, the character of the higher orders in this country; those who reject with disdain the calumnies which have lately been levelled against them; those who know their talents, virtues, and public spirit, may yet apprehend, that they have fallen into an error in cultivating a spirit of too great fastidiousness and reserve. The real titles that they possess to respect, and estimation render it less necessary for them to hedge themselves round with these artificial defences. Their friends fear that they have not chosen wisely for themselves, or for the system of which they are so integral a part; when instead of encircling themselves with the moral support of the most valuable portion of the nation, they have sought the distinctions, and the dangers of a solitary and attenuated elevation.

The most violent Reformers, and democratic writers, have eagerly adopted a classification so favourable to their views. Taking advantage of the added influence obtained by the peerage in the Lower House, and making no allowance for the counterpoise created by the increasing wealth, power, and intelligence of the other parts of the nation, they represented us as governed by a mere junto of Aristocrats. They have not adverted to the fact, that the influence of the great families has been as much and as often exerted on the side of popular rights, as of ministerial power. In their frequent

panegyrics of the independence and intelligence of the middle ranks, and in their fierce attacks upon what they term the oligarchy, they either inadvertently, or designedly, omit all mention of that most important part of the nation, the gentry. So profound a landmark in the feelings, opinions, and modes of life of Englishmen, could not be obliterated by their omission. Like the Holy Alliance, they might trace at pleasure new and capricious boundaries in the map of social life, but they could not efface those moral affinities which unite and distinguish gentlemen. It may justly be complained of, that in all the discussions and plans which have recently been broached upon the subject of Parliamentary Reform, the interests and claims of this most valuable portion of the community should have been overlooked. Placed in right, both of property and intelligence, in the foremost ranks of the people, supplying that demand for intellectual ability by which, in all the professions, the finest operations of the social machinery are conducted, so numerous, independent, and enlightened, as to preclude the possibility of their being classed as an oligarchy, or rendered the willing tools of power, this body has every title to the first consideration in any question of reform. No reform indeed could be otherwise than deeply injurious to the welfare of the State, which should tend in the least to displace them from their proper situation in the community.

We are sensible both of the honesty and industry of the middle classes, and of the great advances they have recently made in education and mental acquirement; still, any reform which either intentionally, or otherwise, should have the effect of transferring the borough influence now possessed by individuals, to these ranks, over-stepping the gentry entirely, would be a complete inversion of the natural and existing order of society. The practical excellence of a House of Commons, depends not upon its conformity to any theory of representation, it consists in its uniting the largest portion of the intellect, independence, and patriotism of the country, within its walls, its structure should be such as to render the attainment of a seat in it of not too difficult acquirement. A mode of election, securing these important results, could not be pronounced radically bad, however it might be susceptible of improvement in the detail.

I will not disguise my impression that a very considerable influence of the gentry in elections, —a fair and natural influence, be it understood, is essential for accomplishing this purpose; still more must I believe that it is among the body of the gentry, that the numbers of the House of Commons must be selected. I have already, I hope, shewn, that I mean no narrow and exclusive limit by this line, their ranks are ever open to receive superior merit, and acquired consequence. Within their wide circle is chiefly con-

finer all the reality of talent, integrity, and liberal feeling, which render them the best fitted to be the depositaries of this sacred trust.

We might rejoice at a reform which should improve our modes of election, or curtail the influence of our great families. That reform would be indeed fatal to the best interests of England, by which the House of Commons should cease to constitute an assembly of gentlemen.

## SECTION IX.

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CONCLUSION.

THE most sincere friends of the great cause of rational freedom may be excused for mingling an almost extreme caution with the warmth of their devotion. The experience of all history proves, that nothing is more difficult, particularly in large States, than to combine liberal institutions with order, stability, and a necessary strength in the executive. The past, indeed, affords us, with a few brilliant exceptions, (the first and most splendid of which is our own constitution,) little more than a melancholy detail of a series of oscillations between anarchy and despotism, ending, for the most part, in the latter.

The path of real freedom is a strait and a narrow one; and it must always be present to the minds of its advocates, that it is beset with equal and formidable dangers on both sides. A very slight deviation from its proper track, will occasion its being lost in absolute power on one side, or in disorder and confusion on the other.

The chief cause, indeed, of the difficulty experienced in the attainment of this great blessing

is, that, both in its pursuit and preservation, a degree of moderation and exemption from passion is necessary, exceeding the average proportion of these qualities in the breast of man. Thus, it may be observed, that visionary theorists upon these points, are always driven to suppose some very extensive improvement in our species in these particulars. They constantly assume that we have become infinitely better fitted to govern ourselves than we were heretofore, and that the deductions of experience are not, therefore, applicable to our present state; but it has uniformly been found that they have been over-sanguine in such views.

The improvements of the human race, and they have been great and real, have not extended yet to give to their reason any strong additional power of self-controul; a variety of fierce and lawless passions still slumber in our breasts, disciplined indeed, but not destroyed by the steady hand of legal government. There seems no just ground to assume that less than the degree of restraint which has always been necessary to deter men from the commission of actions injurious to others, would now suffice.

If we cast our eyes over the present state of Europe, we shall see little reason to apprehend immediate danger to constitutional liberty from any direct attacks of absolute power. The latter principle is universally on the defensive, and is, perhaps, not indisposed to seek some compromise

with its antagonist, but we have not the same security against the assaults of the equally hostile and dangerous spirit of anarchy.

So many quickly succeeding revolutions taking place among people not yet in a high state of intellectual improvement, and, perhaps, commenced, in some cases, without any elevated or patriotic views, must cause extreme anxiety, not merely to the partizans of absolute power, but to the most sincere friends of constitutional freedom.

It is impossible to feel yet assured, that the continental nations, in shaking off the arbitrary sway of their ancient governments, will have the good sense to replace it by institutions of a more free but equally permanent and regular nature. Should they deviate from this rational and moderate course, we must be prepared to witness the great body of European civilization surrendered to a series of convulsions of a fearful character; and unknown termination. We derive, indeed, great hope from the example of France, from the admirable and temperate use she has made of her power, and from the great moral influence she possesses over the other nations of the Continent; but as this influence is reciprocal, there seems, likewise, some risk that those elements of disorder which lurk within her own bosom, may acquire an unfortunate preponderance from the added momentum they may receive from without; and thus the whole state of the Continent, if not one of unmixed gloom, is yet full of causes of

great solicitude. In many places it may be clearly perceived that the struggle is not less between the principles of constitutional liberty, and of anarchy, than between the former and that of absolute power.

The close sympathy which unites even ourselves with the other parts of the great European Commonwealth, gives this state of things an important connexion with the consideration of the question of Reform. With us, indeed, the contest with absolute power has been long over, and we have only to watch with jealousy the encroachments of the other great foes to liberty and to happiness. We ought not, indeed, to reject temperate and judicious ameliorations in our civil institutions; but we should bear it always in mind, that those modifications are introduced in the presence of a watchful enemy, as anxious to subvert as we are to amend.

A strong impression of the actual existence of such a state of things, has chiefly dictated the preceding pages; they have been inspired by no wish to retard the progress of human improvement, but by a fervent desire that its secure and steady march should not be rashly and precipitately compromised. I am conscious that in the irregular and heterogeneous compound of our representative system, there exist considerable imperfections, and much that, with a temperate sagacity, may be advantageously amended; but it is a difficult and dangerous task, and appears to

have been rendered more so, by the clouds of error and misrepresentation with which the subject has been surrounded.

Reform may be compared to one of those complicated and delicate operations of surgical science, by which some diseased portion of the human frame is removed from the very midst of all those beautiful organs, upon which vitality immediately depends. Should such an operation be successful, a source of irritation and uneasiness is removed, the frame acquires additional health and strength, and the result is a glorious triumph of the science of man; but it must be performed upon the maturest deliberation, with a profound knowledge of the anatomy of our structure. The hand that directs the knife through all the intricacies of this wonderful machine, must be firm, bold, and skilful, yet cautious and tender. One trivial error, one false direction of the edge, and life is gone!

In the prosecution of a task requiring the highest degree of coolness, moderation, sagacity, and accurate knowledge, and in which such imminent risk is incurred by the absence of these qualities, it is disquieting to perceive how much the temper of the public mind seems imbued with their direct reverse. A state of strong and feverish excitement, exaggerated and ill defined expectations, appear, of all others, the dispositions to whose guidance we should least willingly surrender ourselves in such a path. They are most favourable,

indeed, to the views of those who seek only change, and would unhesitatingly sacrifice all that we possess to the blind chances of a complete lottery. But those with whom conservation is the first principle, and improvement the second, naturally feel that the difficulty of blending them in any course of action, is much increased by the hostile influence of feelings so irritable, and expectations so exaggerated.

Without venturing myself to attempt the detail of any precise plan of reform, I have been induced to offer to the public the remarks contained in the foregoing pages, from an earnest desire to allay this heated and vague excitement. I am sure that the chances of a beneficial result will be increased in proportion as we approach it in a sober and temperate spirit. Many of my opinions will differ materially from those of numbers of individuals: I hope that I am free from the dogmatism of believing in the infallibility of my own convictions; I cannot help thinking, however, the difference between myself and the readers who dissent from me will be diminished, if, dismissing previous bias, they ask themselves candidly and dispassionately the precise ideas they associate with the word reform.

Let them examine with their own minds the extent to which they really wish change to be carried, let them endeavour to estimate the probable consequences to society of any Parliamentary Reform they might wish to introduce, and let them

answer whether, in a question upon which they feel perhaps so strongly, they see their way clearly and plainly to the secure attainment of practical good. When reform is entertained in this calm and deliberate spirit, I have little doubt that its results will be advantageous to the community. It is to be feared, however, that the public mind is far from considering it in such a temper, and that no plan of reform can have the effect of satisfying its present hopes. We must never forget that the English Constitution is an amalgamation of the popular and monarchical elements of government. It is no easy problem to balance these as they have been balanced. The nicest discrimination and judgment are requisite in adding to the weight of the popular scales. Give it a little too much, and the transition to a Republic, of a peculiarly wild and unsettled character, would be inevitable.

To those whose ardour for Reform has effaced all regard for that Constitution which was so long the object of our pride and affection, and which we so long believed to be the source of our prosperity, I would cite one high authority. To those, who in pursuit of their idol of a pure and perfect representation, would unhesitatingly endanger or sacrifice every other political institution in the state, I would oppose one great name. To those who, like myself, think our Constitution as a whole so excellent, that the spirit of improvement must always remain subordinate to the principle

of conservation, I would secure one mighty support. On this very subject, in the face of the assembled Commons of England, in almost the last display of his splendid powers upon this great theatre of his eloquence and his talents, proclaiming it with the departing tones of that voice which for twenty years had exercised so powerful a sway within its walls. when he left them for a loftier, but scarcely a more brilliant station, the present Lord Chancellor declared, what I trust millions of his countrymen will re-echo, that he would infinitely rather perish beneath the ruins of the Constitution, than survive to lament its destruction.



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